



Centre-based disability services – including life skills development and pathways to employment

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Centre-based disability services, formerly known as day programs, refer to a range of disability support services which are provided in specific purpose facilities and other community facilities. Services may be aimed at enabling social, recreation and community participation; developing independence in activities of daily living; and employment pathways and employment related skill development.

Stay at Home Directions (no.6) outlines limitations on people leaving their usual residence, unless for one of the following reasons:

- to obtain necessary goods or services
- to access medical services
- to attend work or education that cannot be done remotely
- to exercise and participate in some recreational activities
- visiting family or friends (in line with the rules)

While these new Directions slightly ease restrictions, the intent of the Directions is still that people should stay at home and limit contact with other people. This is particularly critical in relation to protecting vulnerable people who are most at risk of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Directions enable people to access services that they believe are necessary for their health, wellbeing and social connection.

In relation to support / service provision, people with disability need to consider whether going out is necessary or whether supports or services can be provided through other mechanisms. Where necessary services / supports are provided in centres or the community, it is critical that physical distancing and appropriate hygiene measures are in place.

Prior to the commencement or resumption of day services, clients, supported by their carers, family members or advocates, should discuss with their service providers the options, benefits and risks so that a preferred plan is agreed.

This guidance on offering disability support group sessions has been developed for use by disability service providers operating in Victoria, funded by the NDIS or Victorian Government.

NDIS-funded service providers need to also adhere to infection control guidance issued by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission at <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/news-media/provider-newsletters#alerts>

It is important to stay up to date with the latest advice from the Chief Health Officer which is available at the department's coronavirus (COVID-19) section of the website <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

What services can be provided?

Skill development, support services or recreation activities, consistent with the restricted activities direction, may be provided by a community service provider to a defined group of clients. Services may be individual or group based.

While Victorians are now able to undertake a wider number of community activities, consideration needs to be given to the purpose of the activity, an individual's health including any underlying medical conditions and vulnerability, and the necessity of undertaking the activities.

Where can services be provided?

Group sessions may be held in a building, open area (e.g. courtyard, garden) or other outdoor setting e.g. a park. Simultaneous group sessions may occur in the same building if they are held in different enclosed rooms. Group sessions in outdoor settings should be well separated from each other so that each group of participants does not mix with other groups.

How many people can attend?

Up to 10 people, plus the minimum number of people required to safely facilitate the meeting or provide the support service, can attend an activity/support service in an indoor or outdoor area so long as the restrictions below are also met.

What other restrictions apply?

- People with cold and flu-like symptoms should not attend.
- No more than 1 person per 4 square metres should be present in an enclosed indoor area. The number of people allowed equals the total area of the space being used (measured in square metres) divided by four. For example, if the program is being run in a room which measures 20 square metres, five people would be allowed in this space. This includes the total number of people in the room: participants, carers, workers and volunteers.
- Signs should be displayed at each entry to indoor areas or rooms used by the service which detail the maximum number of people that are allowed to be present in the indoor area.
- All participants should observe physical distancing measures including at least 1.5 metres separation wherever possible in indoor and outdoor areas.
- Hand washing or hand sanitising by all participants must be undertaken at the beginning and end of the session. (For further guidance see: <http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/staying-safe-physical-distance-and-hygiene-coronavirus>)
- Participants should avoid physical greetings such as handshaking, hugs and kisses
- Cleaning and disinfecting of high touch surfaces, equipment, materials must be undertaken at the beginning and end of each session. (For further guidance see: [Cleaning and disinfecting to reduce COVID-19 transmission: Tips for non-healthcare settings](#))
- Any catering and cooking should adopt the highest standards of hygiene.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is not normally required (for further guidance see: [PPE for community service providers for prevention of COVID-19](#))

Services can only operate with adherence to signage, cleaning and density requirements. Further information about these requirements is at Section 15 of the Restricted Activity Direction no. 7 <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/202005/direction-restricted-activity-no-7-signed-2020-05-11.pdf>

What preparations are required before holding the session?

- Consider whether it is necessary to provide the group session as a face to face event. Can support be provided in other ways.
- Consider whether participants with complex support needs who may have difficulty meeting the requirements for physical distancing and personal hygiene can be safely supported to attend.
- Undertake an assessment of each of the components of the session to consider the potential risks for transmission and what measures can be used to prevent or control them.
- Modify the activities at the group session wherever possible to reduce the transmission risk.
- Consider travel to and from the group session including any waiting or queuing required, and physical distancing on shared transport such as buses.
- Consider whether alternative transport options which reduce the number of people in a vehicle e.g. taxi or ride-share with one participant and driver may be preferable.
- Options to stagger start and finish times to reduce the amount of people congregating together before or after sessions could also be considered, particularly if physical distancing may be difficult to maintain in the waiting area for the service.
- Consider which room provides the best environment e.g. by opening windows and/or adjusting air conditioning to enhance airflow.
- Plan contingency arrangements in case of an unexpected event occurring e.g. coughing attack, spitting, behaviours of concern.
- Consider whether staff/volunteers should include at risk groups (e.g. people aged 70 years and over, people with chronic medical conditions).
- Develop a plan/procedure for the session incorporating the control measures.
- Ensure staff/volunteers at the group session fully understand and implement the plan/procedure.
- Ensure supplies of hand sanitisers and other essential equipment are available.
- Inform participants about how their health will be protected and what they will need to do.

What should be done after the session?

- Undertake regular self-assessments with all the staff/volunteers present to consider how any improvements can be made. This could include discussion of any risks or issues that occurred.
- Keep a record, including the contact details, of all people including participants, staff and volunteers at the group session for at least 30 days, and any improvements suggested.

What if our organisation cannot make a group setting safe to deliver services?

- Organisations need to determine if services can be safely reinstated in line with the current directions.
- If a service is unable to be reinstated at this time, you should consider how you can deliver alternative supports to the people that come to these groups, for example delivering services via telepractice or directly in people's homes.